Committed to The Deep.

By A. St. John Adcock.

The steward knocked, and put his head in at the door.

"Cabin passenger, sir, No. 16," he reported, with a business-like brevity. "Very bad."

Doctor Yalden glanced up from his desk irritably.

"What's the matter with him?"

"Dun'no, sir. Uncommon bad."

"Usual thing, I suppose?"

"No, sir. Not seasick. Queer when he come aboard yesterday, I thought. Been in bed all day. Wouldn't let me get him anything—till just now he asked me to fetch you."

"No. 16, you say? All right."

The steward withdrew, and the doctor only delayed to finish the first paragraph of a letter he had been writing when he was interrupted.

It was not precisely an urgent letter, for he had no intention of doing anything with it until the ship arrived at Liverpool; but it was a letter that required a deal of consideration, and, though he was in most things phlegmatic, he was impatient to have it all ready to post immediately he landed, for it was to contain much that he knew he could not possibly put into speech, and it was to tell the recipient that he would arrive less than half a day behind it.

Few of the passengers were in bed yet, for the night was young; the sea was quiet and the outer air pleasantly warm, and through the rhythmic throbbing of the engine he could hear chattering and laughter and footsteps pacing overhead as he made his way between decks to his patient.

The lamp that shone from the wall of No. 16 showed him a haggard man stretched on the bunk apparently asleep.

He was a youngish man—not much over thirty, anyway. His features were gaunt and tanned with hard living and rough weather, and his hands were coarsened as with manual employments. He slept uneasily, and his breathing was stertorious and difficult.

While the doctor was taking his preliminary survey of him he coughed and awoke.

"Steward!"

"I'm the doctor. You sent for me What's wrong?"

"Oh, thanks. . . . I don't know, doctor. I've felt awfully knocked up for days past, and thought I could throw it off—but I can't. My head's all afire, and my hands, too. Feel that."

The doctor took his hand and laid a finger on his pulse. The hand was hot and dry, the pulse was galloping furiously and a brief examination was sufficient to diagnose his ailment.

"A touch of pneumonia," said Yalden. "You must take more care of yourself than you've been doing lately. You were not fit to travel; you must have felt ill before you started."

"I wanted to get home," the other answered, wearily. "I've been away—a long time."

"We must see what we can arrange about nursing," the doctor concluded. "I'll give you some medicine; you've got a good constitution, and, with care, you'll pull around all right."

"Think so?"

"Oh, yes. . . . He musn't be left, Barrow." The doctor turned to the steward. "Somebody will have to sit up with him tonight. I'll see him again before I turn in; and I'll get the captain to let you have assistance."

After fulfilling which latter duty he retired to his cabin and resumed the laborious composition of his letter.

A glimpse of what he was writing would have amazed any man who knew him, for to everybody who knew him, with one possible exception, Dr. Yalden as a matter of fact, was rather unsympathetic, wholly unromantic man, of nearer fifty than forty; whereas the letter that was slowly developing under his pen might almost have been written by a sentimental youngster in the rapturous agonies of first love. Nobody would have credited the doctor with possessing the smallest streak of sentiment anywhere in his robust, substantial person. He never suspected it himself even until three years ago.

Three years ago he met in London the girl he told himself he had been looking for all his life. She was nearly twenty years his junior, but what did that matter? Her people had been rich and proud, and now, through recent financial disasters, they were poor and prouder, but what did all that matter either? He loved her, and cared for nothing else if she could only love him.

He had been impelled to tell her so; for his ingrained hardness and self-restraint had failed him at the first touch of this bewildering passion that, so long a-coming, subdued him utterly at last She heard him with pity in her eyes, but not love: and she told him, with only pity in her tones, that the man she loved was dead and her heart was buried with him.

Later he learned the story that lay behind her words, and saw more hope in it for himself than she had given him, for surely his living love of her could in due time, win her away from the memory of a dead rival. Beginning to flatter himself that she was already relenting toward him, he had appealed to her again before he last left home, and she had seemed to waver—she silenced him tremulously, and had seemed to hesitate; and feeling that each new day put a barrier between her and her past and removed one from betwixt himself and her, he would not take her answer then, but begged her to think of all it must mean to him and let him ask her for it, once for all, when he came home from his next voyage

He was speeding homeward now, and the letter was to prepare her for his coming.

He wrote it with so many pauses for reflection that by 10 o'clock it was still unfinished when, mindful of his patient, he relocked it in his desk.

No. 16 was awake, but drowsy with sheer weakness.

"The chest's still troublesome," he answered, with a feeble cheerfulness, "but I'm a trifle better, thanks."

The doctor was not so sure of that.

"We've got to keep your strength up somehow," he said; adding to the steward, "Get some beef tea for him, Barrow. I'll stay here while you're gone."

The dim, stuffy litle cabin was silent for awhile, except for the labored respiration of the sick man, who presently, becoming aware of the doctor's ruminant scrutiny, roused himself to speak.

"If I don't pull through this, doctor——"

"Don't worry about that; you will."

"But if I don't—I'm not afraid of dying. I've been near it too often for that; and yet, now, it seems harder than it ever did before."

"You'd better not talk, I don't want you to excite yourself."

"Not me! What I mean is, it would be hard luck to die on the way home. I've been away nearly nine years. I went away as poor as a rat, and I'm going back rich. That's something, isn't it?"

"It's a great deal."

"To me it is. I didn't go out just because I'd got the gold fever. . . . It's out to the Klondike I've been, doctor; away beyond Dawson City, up the Yukon—Lord! it's the kind of country you see in nightmares. I've been seeing it over and over in nightmares ever since I've been ill."

"Don't think of it——"

"I wish I couldn't!" He laughed, but there was a feverish brightness in his eyes, and his voice quavered with suppressed excitement. "I haven't had time to think of it till now."

He went on talking, and Yalden listened absently, with strange doubts troubling his mind; and, so listening, he half-unconsciously fashioned from the other's words visions of vast snow wastes stretching into the night or the day, now silent and lonely as death, now blurred, and whirling, and howling with the fury of a storm, and, always deep in the desolation of it, a desperate little band of adventurers struggled forlornly, chasing a dream, starving, and falling, and dying, some of them, in the track of it; and here, at last, with the unimaginable terrors of that bleak wilderness left behind him, one of the few survivors had emerged triumphant, with his dream realized.

Triumphant, so far.

The doctor eyed him gloomily from under a frown.

"And I'm not dead yet, though I'm supposed to be!" the other chuckled grimly. "One everlasting, terrible winter we were snowed up miles away from anywhere, and we were put down as done for. The wonder is that we were not. Only two of us managed to worry through, and we wandered heaven only knows where, and we lived—well, we didn't live. But we worried through—and I'm going home." His eyes closed and he rambled on dreamily: "Nine years! but she'll be waiting. I told her that it wouldn't be more than two—and she said, 'It's till you come, Ned;